



Heritage Impact Assessment

Hillcrest and
Tussocks, Therfield,
North Hertfordshire

June 2024 | Project Ref 8751A



Project Number: 8751A

File Origin: [https://heritagecollectiveuk.sharepoint.com/sites/8501-9000/Shared Documents/8701-8800/08751 - Hillcrest & Tussocks, Therfield/HER/Reports/2024.05.30 Heritage Statement Hillcrest and Tussocks Therfield V2.docx](https://heritagecollectiveuk.sharepoint.com/sites/8501-9000/Shared%20Documents/8701-8800/08751%20-%20Hillcrest%20&%20Tussocks,%20Therfield/HER/Reports/2024.05.30%20Heritage%20Statement%20Hillcrest%20and%20Tussocks%20Therfield%20V2.docx)

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Contents

1. Introduction	5
2. Relevant Planning Policy Framework.....	8
3. Understanding the Site	11
4. Statement of Significance.....	15
5. Heritage Impact Assessment.....	21
6. Conclusions	30

Appendices

App. 1 Scale of Harm table (HCUK, 2019)

Figures

- Fig. 1 Site location in relation to the centra part of the conservation area**
- Fig. 2 1841 Tithe map extract**
- Fig. 3 1878 25 inches to one mile map extract**
- Fig. 4 1959 six inches to one mile map extract**
- Fig. 5 Current aerial photograph of site in context**
- Fig. 6 View past Hillcrest towards Tussocks' garden**
- Fig. 7 Looking into Tussocks**
- Fig. 8 Parish Church of St Mary the Vergin**
- Fig. 9 The Fox and Hounds public house on the village green**
- Fig. 10 16th century jettied Church Cottage**
- Fig. 11 The Victorian School**

Fig. 12 Part of Fordham's Terrace

Fig. 13 School House

Fig. 14 House opposite the site

Fig. 15 Key View 10 looking down The Causeway into the village centre

Fig. 16 Proposed site plan

Fig. 17 Proposed Hillcrest façade

Fig. 18 Long street elevation showing development in context

Fig. 19 Aerial plan showing site in context and highlighting other examples of back-land housing already within the conservation area

1. Introduction

1.1 This Heritage Statement has been prepared by HCUK Group on behalf of Hanson Services Ltd and relates to a site comprising two properties Hillcrest and Tussocks, both located on the east side of The Causeway, Therfield, Royston North Hertfordshire, SG8 9PP. The two properties are presented as a single site with single set of proposals. North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) are the decision making body for this site.

1.2 Neither of the buildings within the site are listed buildings, they are not included on any local list (non-designated heritage assets) nor are they identified as positive contributors within the conservation area. They fall within the Therfield Conservation Area, an adopted Conservation Area Character Statement (Wood, 2019) is available for this area and identifies key heritage factors such as buildings that contribute positively to the area, key views and open spaces within the area.



Figure 1: The central part of the Therfield Conservation Area illustrating the site location (shaded red) in relation to key views and other assets of interest and relevance. Purple dots represent buildings that make a positive contribution to the conservation area.

The Context

1.3 In October 2023 an application is submitted for the demolition of Hillcrest and its outbuildings, and the provision of 10 new residential units (Ref: 23/02417/FP).

Ongoing discussions during the determination period sought to address concerns but eventually the scheme was withdrawn. The consultations had, however, identified a route by which an alternate scheme received a more positive response particularly from conservation officer in respect of the effect on the conservation area.

1.4 This report is a revised version of that submitted for application 23/02417/FP to consider the amended scheme and acknowledge and set down the changes made as the result of ongoing consultation.

1.5 Fuller consideration of the planning background is provided within the Planning Statement from PJB Planning. This report should be read alongside that statement as well as the package of architectural drawings, plans, elevations and material studies from Kingston Studio.

Purpose of this Statement

1.6 Following a summary background of the development of the site and understanding of the area this report provides statements of significance for the heritage assets which are considered as having the potential to see their significance and special interest affected by the proposals. The primary asset in question is the designated heritage asset of Therfield Conservation Area, in which the site falls. Of key importance is whether or not the proposals cause harm to the conservation area through eroding its values or detrimentally affecting its character and appearance. The relationship of the site and proposals to positive contributor buildings within the conservation area is considered.

1.7 The assessment within this report has been informed by background research and a site visit. The site visit was undertaken in December 2022 in snowy and foggy conditions when visibility was somewhat limited. To augment the understanding gained on the ground, digital tools such as Google Street View have been used to virtually visit and view the site and village without snowy conditions. Images and photographs gathered by the client team and included within documents such as the Conservation Area Character Appraisal have also informed the assessment presented here. The poor conditions at the time of the site visit have not compromised the assessment process or conclusions drawn.

- 1.8** The nearest listed building is located to the site is Elm House, located to the south west (UID: 1102622). Following the site visit and through the application of professional judgement it is considered that this listed building is sufficiently distant from the application site, and divided from it by both mature planting and the presence of intervening houses, that there is no potential for its significance to be affected by the proposals considered here. The site, or indeed the adjacent public domain of The Causeway, affords no means to experience the listed building and no historic associations have been identified between the site and this building that might contribute to its significance as a designated asset. Although relatively close, the site is not considered to form a part of its setting and the proposals have no potential to affect its significance and it is not discussed further here.
- 1.9** This report does not address any aspect of the planning balance for which officers are directed to the planning statement.

2. Relevant Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1** The decision maker is required by section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving the character and appearance of a conservation area when exercising planning functions. The decision maker must give considerable importance and weight to the desirability of preserving the significance of the listed building, and there is a strong presumption against the grant of permission for development that would harm its heritage significance.¹
- 2.2** For the purposes of this statement, preservation equates to an absence of harm.² Harm is defined in paragraph 84 of Historic England's Conservation Principles as change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.³
- 2.3** The significance of a heritage asset is defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023) as being made up of four main constituents: architectural interest, historical interest, archaeological interest and artistic interest as well as any contribution made by its setting. The assessments of heritage significance and impact are normally made with primary reference to the four main elements of significance identified in the NPPF.
- 2.4** The setting of a heritage asset can contribute to its significance. Setting is defined in the NPPF as follows:
- The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral.*
- 2.5** The NPPF requires the impact on the significance of a designated heritage asset⁴ to be considered in terms of either "substantial harm" or "less than substantial harm"

¹ Barnwell Manor Wind Energy Limited v East Northamptonshire District Council and others [2014] EWCA Civ 137. This principle has recently been confirmed, albeit in a lower court, in R (Wyeth-Price) v Guildford Borough Council.

² South Lakeland v SSE [1992] 2 AC 141.

³ Conservation Principles, 2008, paragraph 84.

⁴ The seven categories of designated heritage assets are World Heritage Sites, Scheduled Monuments, Listed Buildings, Protected Wreck Sites, Registered Park and Gardens, Registered Battlefield and Conservation Areas, designated under the relevant legislation.

as described within paragraphs 207 and 208 of that document. National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) makes it clear that substantial harm is a high test, and case law describes substantial harm in terms of an effect that would vitiate or drain away much of the significance of a heritage asset.⁵ The Scale of Harm is tabulated at Appendix 1.

2.6 Paragraphs 207 and 208 of the NPPF refer to two different balancing exercises in which harm to significance, if any, is to be balanced with public benefit.⁶ Paragraph 18a-020-20190723 of National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) online makes it clear that some heritage-specific benefits can be public benefits. Paragraph 18a-018-20190723 of the same NPPG makes it clear that it is important to be explicit about the category of harm (that is, whether paragraph 207 or 208 of the NPPF applies, if at all), and the extent of harm, when dealing with decisions affecting designated heritage assets, as follows:

Within each category of harm (which category applies should be explicitly identified), the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated.

2.7 Paragraphs 205 and 206 of the NPPF state that great weight should be given to the conservation of a designated heritage asset when considering applications that affect its significance, irrespective of how substantial or otherwise that harm might be.

2.8 Paragraph 213 of the NPPF acknowledges that not all areas of a conservation area may make the same contribution to character or appearance and that any loss of a building or feature that makes a positive contribution should be assessed as either substantial or less than substantial harm under the above paragraphs 207 or 208 respectively taking into account the relative significance of the element affected and its contribution to the conservation area as a whole.

⁵ Bedford Borough Council v SSCLG and Nuon UK Limited [2013] EWHC 4344 (Admin).

⁶ The balancing exercise was the subject of discussion in City and Country Bramshill v CC SLG and others [2021] EWCA, Civ 320.

Local Policy

2.9 The North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted on Tuesday 8 November 2022 and replaces the saved policies of the District Plan Second Review with Alterations.

2.10 Policy SP13 relates to the Historic Environment and reads:

Policy SP13: Historic environment *The Council will balance the need for growth with the proper protection and enhancement of the historic environment. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight will be given to the asset's conservation and the management of its setting. We will pursue a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment through:*

- a) Maintaining a strong presumption in favour of the retention, preservation and enhancement of heritage assets and their setting according to their significance;*
- b) Identifying sites on the national register of Heritage at Risk or on the Council's 'At Risk' register;*
- c) Periodic reviews of Conservation Areas and other locally designated assets; and*
- d) Publication of detailed guidance.*

2.11 There is no adopted local list of non-designated heritage assets within Therfield. The adopted Conservation Area Character Statement (2019) includes identification of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the area. Close to this site the row of housing north of the site, Fordham's Terrace, is included on the map as is 'School House' and the school buildings immediately south of the site.

3. Understanding the Site

Therfield

- 3.1** Therfield is mentioned in the domesday book and its ancient origins are clearly reflected in the village today which includes the scheduled remains of the post conquest Tuthill motte and bailey castle (list entry: 1009245), as well as associated earthworks both within the scheduled area and in other open spaces in the village.

Map regression

- 3.2** The earliest map evidence of any detail is contained within the 1841 Tithe map and apportionment for the parish. There appears to be a building and small plot on the site of the current Hillcrest, with an adjacent building hard against and perpendicular to the road. The pond to the south eastern corner of todays site also seems to be indicated. The long L shaped plot that makes up much of the site (Plot 55) is owned at this point by George Fordham, along with the large parcel numbered 37 to the north east, and the land and several houses west of The Causeway, as well as the two building blots immediately south: tenements and gardens. The two small plots in the middle of The Causeway are identified as cottages and gardens owned by James Jude but tenanted by others.



Figure 2: The 1841 Tithe map showing area of site,

3.3

The Fordham Family were local notables, they had founded the Royston Bank in 1808, were much involved in local politics, some known to be radical in their approach, owned substantial amounts of land and property in and around Therfield and Royston. Some members of the family were involved in brewing, developing a brewery in Ashwell to be the largest in the area until the mid 20th century when sold on. Others were members of the clergy in the Unitarian Church. The trustees of Mr Francis John Fordham arranged for the construction of Fordham's terrace and the family probably may also have paid for the construction of the School house on their former tenement sites by 1871 (when the school houses are recorded on the census).

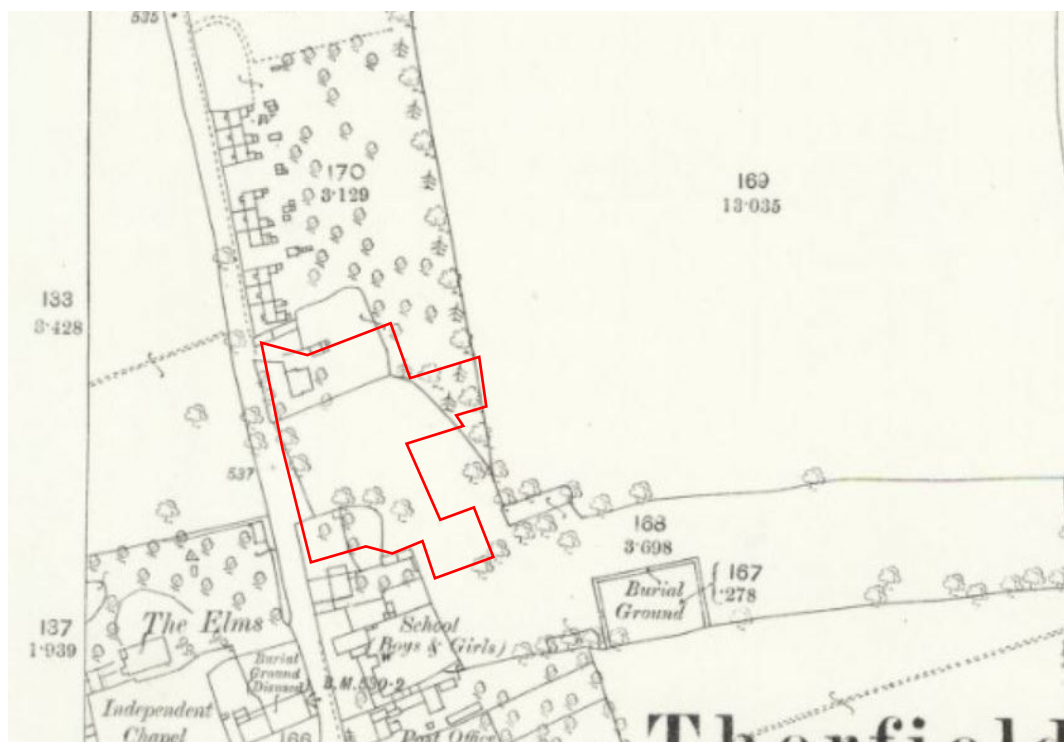


Figure 3: 1878 25 inches to one mile map with today's site outline approximately overlain

3.4

The Village experienced little substantive change until the later 20th century with the early maps of this period reflecting the continuity of the 19th century layout. In the later 20th century individual houses were added around and into the site. Hillcrest, though it stands on the footprint of an earlier dwelling is most likely a reconstruction of the 1980s with consent granted in 1987 for a two bedroom detached dwelling and garage; it was extended in 2006 (refs: 87/00648/I and 06/01243/IHH). On the western side of The Causeway the large property associated with The Elms (listed building) was also subdivided creating Beacon Field

house to the north and later Maplefield (15/0229141). The date of Tussock's is unknown but it too has a late 20th century character being a large bungalow with garage to one side.



Figure 4: 1959 six inches to one mile map showing little alteration in the layout of the village or infilling of sites.

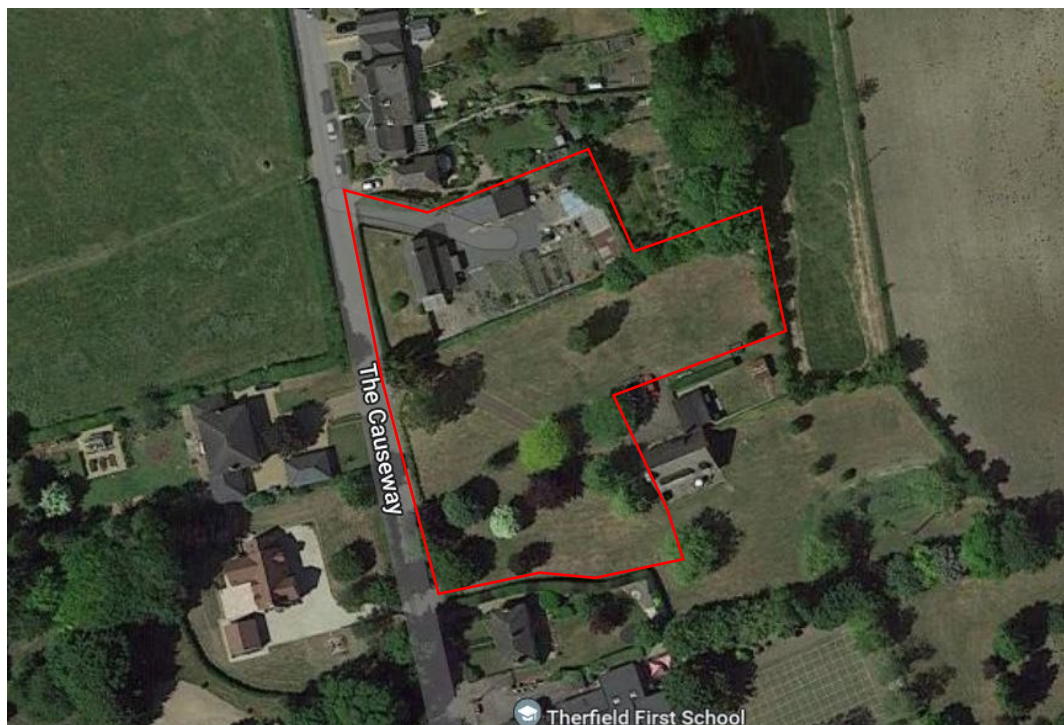


Figure 5: aerial photograph over the site showing addition of Tussock's within the site and two modern dwellings on the opposite western side of The Causeway

3.5

Today the site is occupied by Hillcrest, which sits on slightly higher ground at the southern end of Fordham's Terrace, and Tussocks a bungalow in large gardens which extend around the house and feature several mature trees.



Figure 6: View past Hillcrest towards the garden trees of Tussocks.



Figure 7: Looking into Tussocks.

4. Statement of Significance

Assessment of Significance

- 4.1** This chapter of the report establishes the significance of the relevant heritage assets in the terms set out in the NPPF, specifically the character and appearance of the conservation area and the contribution made by the site and its immediate surroundings.

Therfield Conservation Area

- 4.2** The adopted conservation area includes a succinct statement of special interest for the conservation area with which this assessment agrees:

"Therfield is an attractive rural village. The scheduled remains of a 12th century motte and bailey castle and palisaded enclosure are evidence of settlement at Therfield dating back 900 years. It has a range of early buildings dating from the 14th to 16th century that show the nature of the late medieval and early post-medieval village as it expanded from the castle site in the west of the Conservation Area towards the village green that is now Therfield's focal point. Later buildings, generally in brick, have expanded the village to the north and south of the green." (Wood, 2019, para.2.2)

- 4.3** The high archaeological value of the village is highlighted here and is readily apparent within the conservation area itself through the good legibility of surviving earthworks which enables an understanding of the longevity of settlement and human activity within the village even to non-specialists who might observe the irregularities in the fields and spaces where remains stand as earthworks. The significance of the remains at the castle is reflected in its scheduled status but this interest clearly extends beyond the scheduled site into other open ground, including that west of The Causeway. Where later houses have developed the village buried archaeological remains may still retain potential interest and the earliest of the houses within the village also have their own evidential value and archaeological interest pertaining to the continuity of human activity in the settlement.



Figures 8-9: Parish church of St Mary the Virgin and, right, the Fox and Hounds public house located on the edge of the village green and making use of the area in front as a beer garden.



Figure 10: 16th century Church Cottage with jetties to two elevations representing some of the vernacular architectural tradition within the conservation area.

4.4

Architectural values in the conservation area is focussed on the various forms, types and periods of buildings as well as in their material qualities whether truly

vernacular and reflecting particular local traditions, or later styles which reflect more national trends and the movement around the country of contrasting materials when the advent of mass transport (railways/canals) enabled this. Different functions of buildings and sites are also reflected and add to the architectural interest of the conservation area in illustrating distinct building types alongside domestic forms. The village includes various farm complexes with architectural evidence of barns and other practical agricultural functions. The main parish church provides important ecclesiastical styles with later non-conformist traditions also represented. Similar community uses are reflected in the school buildings.



Figure 11: late Victorian school building with later additions, architectural similarity to Fordham's terrace in pilaster detailing and materials.

4.5

The conservation area has historic value in providing a direct link to the past by retaining structures, spaces and routes, that have evolved over time and, in their varied style, enable an understanding of that development. Associative values are linked to notable residents or historic events.

- 4.6** The site sits in the northern part of the village along The Causeway which is characterised in the main by the terraced housing of Fordham's Terrace. These groups of houses have a similar symmetrical style, though all adapted to a greater or lesser degree and with several additions to the sides in later periods. The Causeway is at a markedly lower level than the houses so they are elevated from street level with a degree of visual prominence.



Figure 12: one of the blocks of Fordham's terrace, note elevated level, symmetrical arrangement around the central pediment and pilaster detailing.

- 4.7** At the southern end of The Causeway where it leads towards the Green the historic character is illustrated in the school buildings and former School House, which are in a similar yellow brick to Fordham's Terrace and which give a strong degree of material continuity to the eastern side of The Causeway. Between these two are more recent houses in a wider variety of materials and generally larger scale, including Hillcrest and Tussocks with its surrounding garden making up the site. These buildings are not considered positive contributors within the conservation area but represent more recent interventions illustrating the growth of the village and continued need for houses. Their architectural contribution is not 'special' or of interest in heritage terms.



Figure 13: School House, matched yellow brick to Fordham's terrace though slightly earlier in date.



Figure 14: Modern housing opposite from the site, the openness of the field west of The Causeway is apparent on the right.

4.8

Key view 10 identified within the conservation area statement is situated on The Causeway, parallel to the end of Fordham's Terrace and looking south towards the village centre. In it the road has an informal character with soft verges, only partly

defined with curbs closer in to the village, and a variety of boundary treatment from estate fencing, hedges, to open grass. This informal nature of the road edges contributes to the rural village character however the land beyond the road edge is not 'rural' or agricultural, but private gardens. There is little illustrative interest pertaining to any historic agricultural function or use and the character is clearly of modern garden with mowed grass and specimen trees, particularly within the Tussock's Site. There is a degree of openness, however, which contributes to some sense of spaciousness on the entry into the village and reflects the historic situation to a small degree and makes a minor ongoing contribution to historic interest through illustrating the historic layout of the village. This is particularly true in longer views down The Causeway where the set back position of the houses means that their facades are not part of these long aligned views. As soon as one is passing the individual properties though, the nature of the gardens and presence of the more recent housing is readily apparent and the spaciousness is not consistent with Fordham's Terrace offering a continuous built row. The area of Hillcrest maintains the higher ground level, with banked grassy slope down to the road and general building line of Fordham's Terrace though exhibits none of the material qualities or traditional aesthetic.



Figure 15: Key View 10 looking along The Causeway towards the village green with the Site on the left.

5. Heritage Impact Assessment

- 5.1** This chapter of the report assesses the impact of the proposed development on the significance of the heritage assets identified in the previous chapter, namely the Therfield Conservation Area. It is again noted that the nearest listed building 'Elm House' cannot be experienced from the site, or nearby public domain and changes within the site are considered possible without eroding or affecting the unique heritage values of that listed building or how it might be experienced.

Proposals

- 5.2** The application relates to the development of the site with seven residential units, revised down from the original ten. The Hillcrest site is proposed to become a terrace of three, with gardens behind and garages serving those plots set against the eastern site boundary.
- 5.3** A single entrance drive will be located in the Tussock's area of the site passing through the existing boundary to the rear of the Hillcrest area.
- 5.4** In the centre of the site two individual houses are located, one (plot 4) to the western side with a large area of lawn in front, one to the rear (Plot 5).
- 5.5** A semi-detached pair of dwellings is located on the southern side of the site, fronting The Causeway with a build line set back from the adjacent building 'The School House' to the south.



Figure 16: Site plan (Kingston Studio)

Design

- 5.6** The design of the scheme has sought to limit and reduce any negative effects of the scheme through providing careful detailing and selection of materials sensitive to the wider area and this part of Therfield in particular.
- 5.7** The design of the Hillcrest houses, units 1 - 3, has deliberately taken their cue from Fordham's Terrace looking to maintain the strong sense of linear development here, the established building line, and core features such as the yellow brick, projecting porches, pilasters framing the facades. The dwellings present a symmetrical arrangement and comparable scale.



Figure 17: the façade of the proposed terrace on the Hillcrest area. (Kingston Studio)

5.8 The existing building on the Hillcrest site, though ostensibly with a long lived footprint, is not a building of particular historic merit or aesthetic quality. Its render, windows and detailing, are nondescript. Planning history suggests it is a rebuild from the 1980s and it has no innate heritage interest either in and of itself, or in terms of making any contribution to the conservation area other than representing a longstanding domestic property. The proposed replacements here maintain the building line of the existing and continuing the Fordham's Terrace line and offers a sensitive modern intervention inspired by the local context that continues the material and aesthetic characteristics of a series of historic buildings which are considered positive contributors within the conservation area – Fordham's Terrace. Though the specific form of building on this site will change the overall character and aesthetic of the frontage is considered enhanced through the proposals.

5.9 At the rear of Hillcrest, the previously proposed dwellings have been removed from the scheme and replaced with ancillary car parking structure and access as well as longer private gardens to plots 1-3. The structure proposed here is single storey and very much in keeping with existing structures in this area. This maintains a sense of hierarchy in this part of the site between frontage houses and ancillary structures to the rear. Though officers raised some concern that any structure here would 'establish a hinterland of built form behind the frontage buildings... that goes against the established grain' it is noted that the Hillcrest property already includes a series of low linear sheds to the rear behind the main house (see Figure 5), including one on the approximate location of the proposed carport/garage; this built

form is already part of the established grain and the proposed introductions are in keeping with that, not against it.

- 5.10** A similar approach has been taken to units 6 and 7 which are located close to School House, an historic building again in yellow brick. Here a simpler façade approach has been taken with a pair of dwellings beneath a hipped roof also constructed in a local yellow brick to sit sensitively next to School House. The position of these units is set well back behind the built footprint of School House to retain its prominence and visibility and also to maintain a sense of openness along the road's edge of The Causeway maintaining the break in the building line which the Tussock's garden currently provides between Fordham's Terrace and School House. There is no proposed division in areas in front of these units to limit disruption to this open space.
- 5.11** Plot 4 sits slightly further back within the site, preserving openness along The Causeway. Its design has been adapted to a more domestic style appropriate for this village centre location, a change from the previously submitted agricultural language. Behind this Plot 5 sits between the existing and retained house Tussocks, and the outbuildings within the Hillcrest part of the site. Greater landscaping in front of this dwelling following consultation enhances the sense of openness within the centre of the site and the scale of this dwelling has also been reduced.
- 5.12** The scheme looks to prioritise the retention of a sense of openness along The Causeway and retention, and addition of trees within the site. The extent of trees within the site already limits actual views through and the proposals seek to retain trees throughout the scheme, and in particular along The Causeway to preserve this sense of greenery within the site softening the visual presence of new dwellings.
- 5.13** The long street elevations prepared illustrate that the positioning of the new buildings leaves substantial amounts of open space between plots and within the centre of the site as it might be seen and experienced from The Causeway.

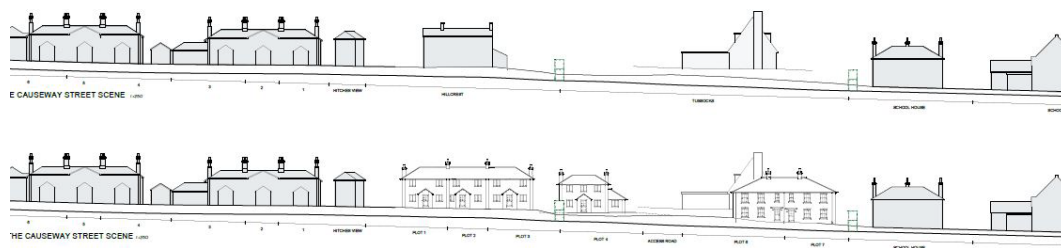


Figure 18: Street elevation with adjacent context showing existing (top) and proposed (bottom) Note retained and new trees are not shown but will soften and screen new form on the Tussocks Site, generally comparable ridge lines and scale of buildings. (Kingston Studio)

Impact assessment

- 5.14** The proposal will introduce change into this area of the conservation area. It will redevelop one existing domestic site with an increased number of dwellings and will see new dwellings introduced into a current substantial garden around another existing bungalow. Though the current openness of the Tussock's site is not overtly of historic interest, it is a long standing 'gap' in built form in this part of the village and the way that this 'gap' creates a sense of space on entry to the village centre is considered positive and is highlighted as a 'key view' within the Conservation Area Character Statement.
- 5.15** This assessment continues to find that the redevelopment of the Hillcrest site does not cause any harm to the character or appearance of the conservation area. Its aesthetic and material palette are respectful of the existing built form in the area and the long established linear pattern of development on The Causeway with the strong building line and elevated position of Fordham's Terrace preserved and continued.
- 5.16** The scheme for the Hillcrest part of the site includes an ancillary garage structure which will replace an extant series of sheds located against the eastern boundary. Though officers' had concerns about additional development here, the site today includes two linear ranges of outbuildings which already form part of the conservation area, replacement of one of these to provide garaging for the new frontage buildings is entirely appropriate and does not change or erode the extant character of the conservation area.

5.17 In general, the proposals for the whole site respect the existing architectural values of the conservation area and do not introduce new forms or materials that would be discordant or disruptive of that value. The units at nos. 1-4 and 7-8 in particular are carefully designed along traditional lines and using traditional yellow brick which is an important material characteristic on The Causeway. A similar material is considered to be most sensitive in these locations which sit directly adjacent to historic buildings rather than something which is overtly contrasting. Different materials to the rear build on the prevailing materials of the already later Tussocks, or the ancillary structures behind Hillcrest. The proposals are not considered to erode architectural values in the conservation area but to sit sensitively alongside buildings which are considered positive within the area.

5.18 The development of the Tussocks garden will see some erosion of this openness, and the introduction of houses on a pattern which is not wholly typical within the conservation area – that is behind the street frontage zone. However, it is notable that Tussocks already sits well behind the more historic building line in a contrasting development location to older dwellings and that from this point and further south towards the village core additional buildings and houses are found set behind the street frontages as shown in Figure 19. These include a series of converted farm buildings to the south at Hay Farm and two substantial dwellings at Thistledown and The Sadolins behind the Old Post House. Elm House the nearest listed building is also not developed along the street frontage, showing that historically towards the village's core this trend was not entirely fixed for all dwellings. The revised designs have addressed officers' concerns and sought to limit any harmful effects of increased dwellings within the area in the following ways:

- Provision of substantial green space along The Causeway and the sense of openness here with a soft edge along the provided pavement. Not subdividing the space along The Causeway to maintain the current 'gap'. Use of informal wildflower meadow grass along this edge to preserve the gentler rural character.
- Ensuring the proposed dwellings are sensitive to the extant scale, below the Tussock's ridgeline, comparable to the Fordham's Terrace on the Hillcrest Site. Slightly rising ground levels within the site raise buildings slightly higher but the forms and heights are carefully matched to avoid dominating existing buildings.

- Careful material palette inspired by the local area in particular yellow brick to the frontage, alongside School House with red brick to the rear adjacent to Tussocks.
- Preservation of only a single point of entry and the location of specific parking areas well screened to limit the visual presence of car parking from The Causeway.
- Retention of substantial numbers of trees, and addition of new trees and natural hedgerow planting to soften the built form.
- Positioning the buildings to preserve considerable space through the centre of the site when viewed from The Causeway preserving as much visual 'space' as possible.
- Reduction in number of units to restrict density, enlarged gardens and limited additional development of new buildings (unit 5) set back from the frontages (the proposed garages on the Hillcrest site are not new but a replacement of an existing structure)



Figure 19: The site showing circled to the south, examples of dwellings and built form towards the village core which are not located on the street frontage and representing an aspect of the character and appearance of the village core already (Kingston Studio)

5.19 The above design factors, and the presence of extant buildings behind a strict street frontage layout already within the conservation area as part of its character, minimises any level erosion of the conservation area's character and appearance but this assessment finds that the proposals still gives rise to a small degree of 'harm' in heritage terms. The current scheme which reduces density, provides more garden space, and fewer properties to the rear reduces that harm still further to a very low level. The harm remaining arises from the continued introduction of additional buildings into a site which has been relatively undeveloped throughout the history of the village, despite the existence of existing development elsewhere

in the conservation area that already establishes this pattern as not totally uncharacteristic. Tussocks and its surrounding garden is no longer entirely 'rural' in character and it therefore does not retain a complete or strong aspect of historic legibility and integrity. For this reason, though the site's openness remains making some contribution to historic illustrative values, it is altered and thus the contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation areas historic or architectural values is comparatively low. With reference to the table included at Appendix 1 the harm is firmly less than substantial, and after the above design factors for the present reduced scheme are considered, the harm sits very much at the lower end of the scale.

5.20 The less than substantial harm identified must be balanced against public benefits in line with the requirements of paragraph 202 of the NPPF. The proposals do not offer overt heritage benefits, but public benefits are identified within the Planning Statement accompanying the application and readers are directed there for a full summary. In brief public benefits include the provision of new family homes within a sustainable location, through new family housing support for community facilities such as the school, public houses, community groups and clubs, biodiversity net gain and richer habitats provided as well as the benefit of employment throughout the development phase.

5.21 Officers, including the conservation officer, were content that the current proposals are supportable in heritage terms and acknowledged the positive evolution of the scheme in response to officer concern on previous iterations.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1** This assessment has considered the heritage significance, character and appearance of a site within the village of Therfield, occupying two existing properties Hillcrest and Tussocks. As identified in the introduction no listed buildings or other designated assets, aside from the conservation area are affected. Neither building within the site is a heritage asset of any type, but the open area of the Tussocks site is considered to make a small positive contribution to the area's historic values having been relatively open throughout the village's history and into the current time. Though the undeveloped nature is ostensibly long lived its character has changed noticeably from a paddock or pasture to a domestic garden. The open nature of the site contributes to an identified 'Key View' within the conservation area particularly in respect of its openness as a 'gap' between historic buildings and in the informal grassy road edges to The Causeway which preserve a more rural character.
- 6.2** The proposals have been informed by an understanding of the built characteristics of the conservation area and in particular the material and aesthetic qualities of positive contributor buildings to either side of the site. They have sought to position and locate new dwellings in such a way that preserves important elements such as the informal soft road edges to The Causeway and a sense of a gap between Fordham's Terrace and Hillcrest and School House. The positioning also acknowledges both the strong linear development pattern of The Causeway but also that to the south of the site, within the village core, the pattern of development does include several examples of houses set behind the road frontages as an existing characteristic of the conservation area.
- 6.3** This scheme has evolved in direct consultation with officers and has addressed concerns raised, reducing the proposed number of dwellings, increasing garden areas and limiting built form to the rear/interior of the site.
- 6.4** The proposed development of the Hillcrest part of the site is not considered harmful to the character or appearance of the conservation area.
- 6.5** In respect of the Tussocks site though design considerations and most recent revisions have limited the extent of effect, because this area continues to have a

relatively strong degree of openness, the development will erode this slightly further, lessening the sense of this as an historically open area within the village. Because this area has already been domesticated with a house and garden its contribution to the character of the village is lower and the resultant harm from the current proposals remains firmly at the lower end of less than substantial.

6.6 The current scheme was developed in conjunction and consultation with officers and has addressed concerns with the reduction in unit numbers and focus of development more towards the frontage of the site, rather than to the rear.

6.7 Having identified less than substantial harm at the lower end of the spectrum decision makers are directed to the planning statement for a review of the public benefits coming forward as part of the proposals which can be considered in the necessary balancing exercise against the identified less than substantial harm to the Conservation Area.

Appendix 1

Scale of Harm (HCUK, 2019)

The table below has been developed by HCUK Group (2019) based on current national policy and guidance. It is intended as simple and effect way to better define harm and the implications of that finding on heritage significance. It reflects the need to be clear about the categories of harm, and the extent of harm within those categories, to designated heritage assets (NPPF, paragraphs 201 and 202, and guidance on NPPG).⁷

Scale of Harm	
Total Loss	Total removal of the significance of the designated heritage asset.
Substantial Harm	Serious harm that would drain away or vitiate the significance of the designated heritage asset
Less than Substantial Harm	High level harm that could be serious, but not so serious as to vitiate or drain away the significance of the designated heritage asset.
	Medium level harm, not necessarily serious to the significance of the designated heritage asset, but enough to be described as significant, noticeable, or material.
	Low level harm that does not seriously affect the significance of the designated heritage asset.

HCUK, 2019

⁷ See NPPG 2019: "Within each category of harm (which category applies should be explicitly identified), the extent of the harm may vary and should be clearly articulated." Paragraph 018 Reference ID: 18a-018-20190723.

Standard Sources

<https://maps.nls.uk>

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Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990

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